Color is Here... or is it?

Editorial   By Benjamin E. Sones

With both of the major players in the Palm OS handheld market (Palm, Inc. and Handspring) offering color models this holiday season, and Sony promising to follow suit later this year or early next with a color version of its new CLIE, it will be interesting to see how consumers respond. Applications are adopting color at an astonishing rate, and the presence or lack of color support has become a standard issue in Palm software reviews. But only a relatively small number of Palm users even have color devices, and while those numbers continue to grow, it seems that sales of cheaper, non-color devices such as the standard Visor and the new Palm m100 continue to eclipse them.

Cost is an obvious issue. Some people were surprised at the high price tag of the Prism, the long-expected color version of the Visor. At $449 (compared to $149 for a bare-bones Visor), it's hardly entry-level hardware. The Palm IIIc is in a similar boat with a retail price of $399 (significantly higher than the m100—like the Visor, it sells for $149).

The Prism comes with enough nifty features to justify the price, but you could argue that the market really didn't need another high-end color handheld. Gangbuster sales of both the Visor and the m100 suggest that what consumers really want are more low cost options, and it doesn't seem likely that one will become available any time soon (Sony's color CLIE I expected to retail in the same price range as the Prism and IIIc). Until a low cost

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Battery life is another issue, and it's a problem that handheld makers probably have a lot less control over. Advances in battery technology have been relatively slow, and power supply is rapidly becoming the lodestone of the portable age. Even with special packs designed to hold more juice than standard AAAs, color Palm devices sap battery life much faster than their black-and-white cousins. The backlight is the main culprit—current color displays require backlighting in order to function effectively, and as any black-and-white Palm users know, the backlight is terrible on battery life. Increased color depth will likely add to the problem. That 16-bit display on the Visor Prism sure looks pretty, but how quickly will processor-intensive 16-bit applications go through juice? We'll just have to wait and see.

One solution would be to adopt a reflective color LCD display similar to the one used in Nintendo's GameBoy. It lacks the color depth of the Prism, and you can't use it in the dark, but it runs forever on standard AA batteries. Supply might be a problem—Nintendo currently buys reflective color LCDs faster than manufacturers can make them. A reflective color Palm device sure would be nice to have, though.

Especially if you could buy it for the same price as a GameBoy.

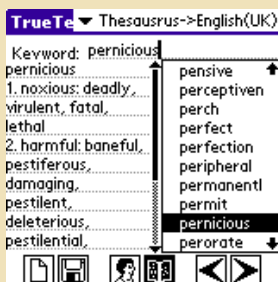**Review**   **TrueTerm Thesaurus**   *$30, Alphasoft, www.trueterm.com*

It has been brought to our attention that we made an error in last week's thesaurus feature. We installed the wrong version of the Alphasoft TrueTerm Thesaurus database, and as such the statistics that we listed for that product were incorrect. In fairness to Alphasoft, we decided to take another, closer look at the TrueTerm Thesaurus.

The database that comes with the retail version of the software is actually a whopping 2 MB in size, with over 200,000 keywords. It's also customizable—you can easily add new keywords and synonyms, and you can switch back and forth between the original and user (the version with your own entries) databases with the push of a button. The Thesaurus is also available in multiple languages—English, Spanish, French, Italian, German, Portuguese, Dutch, and Swedish.

TrueTerm Thesaurus is not cheap—at $30, it costs two to three times as much as other Palm thesauruses on the market. It's the only product that allows you to modify your database, however, so if customizeability is a big issue, then TrueTerm is your best (and only) option.
—*Benjamin E. Sones*